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GENE AUTRY

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Gene Autry and the GHOST OF TABIRÁ

LATE ONE AFTERNOON, FLAMBEAU HOBBS, GENE AUTRY'S OLD PROSPECTOR FRIEND, TOPS A RISE ON THE MANZANO MOUNTAINS, TERRITORY OF NEW MEXICO, AND LOOKS DOWN ON A STRANGE, WEIRD SIGHT...

GOSH, A'NIGHTY! LOOK, JOCKO! THE PUEBLO O' TABIRÁ! JUST LIKE PANHANDLE PETE AND IT'D LOOK!



SURE HOPE PETE WAS RIGHT!
'BOUT BURIED TREASURE HERE,
TOO!



GONNA CAMP OUT HERE!
DON'T TAKE T' THEM
RUINS! TOO BURNED
SPOOKY LOOKIN'!



AFTER SUPPER...

AIN'T SEEN NO WILD CRITTERS! NEH
HEEED NONE! BUT 'TWO'NT HURT
T'KEEP THE FIRE A-GOIN' JUST IN
CASE!



SURE TIRED! KINDA GOT
THE JIMJAMS, TOO! SO
DAWGONE QUIET!



AT THE SAME MOMENT NOT FAR AWAY...

WHERE YUH GOIN',
ROCKY?

UP TO THE TOWER FOR
A LOOKSEE, DEAC! I'M
NOT HANKERIN' FOR THE
LAW TO SNEAK UP ON
US, UNSUSPECTED-LIKE!



FAT CHANCE O' THAT! AIN'T A SHERIFF
IN THE SOUTHWEST WHO'D FIGURE
WE'RE USIN' THESE RUINS FOR A
HIDE-OUT!

MAYBE NOT,
BARNEY!



BUT SINCE HAZEL TOLD US THAT
PROFESSOR HOMBERG, NILES, SENT
FOR GENE AUTRY, I'M NOT TAKIN'
ANY CHANCES!



WHAT IN BLAZES!



WHAT'S UP ROCKY?
YUH LOOK LIKE YUH
SEEN A GHOST!

I SAW WORSE!
A CAMPFIRE AN' A
BURRO! SOMEBODY'S
CAMPIN' OVER BY
THE CHURCH!



YOU'RE LOCO!
NOBODY'D COME
OUT HERE TO
CAMP!

GO UP AN' LOOK
FOR YOURSELF,
BARNEY! I SAW—





WHAT! WHERE?
HOW COME??

HE'S BEEN ACTING
KINDA FUNNY FOR
A WEEK! LIKE HE
WAS UP TO
SOMETHING—



WHEN I STARTED UP HERE
AROUND SUNDOWN, I SPOTTED
HIM TRAILING ME! SO I DUCKED
FOR COVER! WHEN HE CAME
ALONG, FOLLOWING MY TRACKS,
I STOPPED HIM!



HE WAS SO SURPRISED, HE GAVE
IT AWAY HE WAS ONTO US AND
THIS HIDE-OUT! I BEAT HIM TO
THE DRAW! THAT'S ALL THERE
WAS TO IT!

OF ALL THE LOCO
STUNTS! NOW WE
ARE IN THE SOUP!



WHAT DO YOU
MEAN?

I MEAN WHEN GENE AUTRY
FINDS OUT NILES HAS
BEEN SHOT, HE WON'T
REST 'TILL HE GETS THE
KILLED!



THEN HE'S SURE GONNA LOSE A LOT OF
SLEEP BECAUSE HE'LL NEVER FIN IT
ON ME! COME ON! LET'S EAT! THEN
WE'LL SEE ABOUT GETTING RID OF
WHOEVER OWNS THAT BURRO AND
CAMPFIRE!

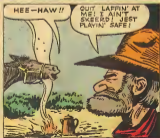
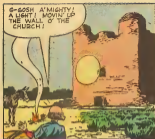


JUST BEFORE DAWN...

HEEE—HAW!

SAD-BAT IT!
WHAT IN
THUNDER
AHS YUH
NAOW?





GOSH! SHE'S YAMMOSED!
PROB'LY SATISFIED! NOW
WE'RE CLEARIN' OUT!



SURE GONNA SMACK DOWN
PANHANDLE PETE! NEXT TIME
I SEE HIM! BURNED SALOOT!
OUGHTA TOLD ME 'BOUT THAT
HANT!



SOMETIME LATER...

WAY THEM BUZZARDS'RE
CIRCLIN', MUST BE
MORE'N ROCKS IN
THAT DRAW!



SURE FIGGERED RIGHT!
THAT'S AN HOMERE!
LYIN' BY THEM
BUSHES!



LOOKS LIKE HE'S DONE FER!
PROB'LY TOO MUCH SUN!
AN' NO WATER!



SURE FIGGERED WRONG!
BEEN SHOT! THREE
TIMES!



POCKETS 'RE PLUMB EMPTY! KILLER MUSTA DONE IT! SO'S NOBODY'D KNOW WHO HE WAS! IF HE EVER GOT FOUND!



A LITTLE LATER...



MUCH LATER...



FAGINATION! WHAT YUH TRYIN' T' DO? RUN ME DOWN?

COULD BE!



GENE AUTRY!

HOWDY, FLAPJACK! LONG TIME NO SEE!







THE GOOD FATHER WAS REAL SURPRISED
AN' ASKED 'EM HOW COME!

A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG
SPANISH LADY CAME
TO SEE US, PADRE!
SHE TOLD US TO DO
THIS! AND SHE
SPOKE TO US IN
OUR OWN TONGUE!

IMPOSSIBLE!
WE HAVE NO
FEMALE
MISSIONARIES!
YOU MUST BE
MISTAKEN!



ALL THE INJUNS SWORE THE STORY WAS TRUE!
THEN THEY FOLLOWED THE PADRE INTO
THE CHURCH TO PRAY!

PADRE! THE LADY
WHO CAME TO SEE
US WAS DRESSED
LIKE THAT ONE!

SANTA MARIA! THAT
IS A PORTRAIT OF
MOTHER LUISA DE
CARSON! SHE IS
ABSESS OF THE
AGREDA CONVENT
RUE AWAY IN SPAIN!



FATHER BENAVIDES WAS MIGHTY PUZZLED BY ALL THIS! BUT HE SENT TWO
MISSIONARIES BACK WITH THE INJUNS! AN' THAT WAS THE BEGINNIN' OF
THE TABIRA MISSION!



A YEAR LATER, THE TABIRA CHURCH WAS
FINISHED! IT WAS THE BIGGEST ONE EVER
BUILT IN NORTH AMERICA!



IN 1680, FATHER BENAVIDES
WENT TO SPAIN AND HEADED
STRAIGHT FOR THE CONVENT
AT AGREDA!



HE LEARNED THAT MOTHER LUISA WAS DEAD!
THE NUN ADDRESS, MARIA CORONEL,
RECEIVED HIM AND HEARD HIS STORY!

PADRE BENAVIDES, I AM THE ONE
WHO SENT THE INDIANS TO YOU!
I VISITED THEM WHILE I WAS
IN A TRANCE!

PADRE BENAVIDES CHECKED UP ON
HER STORY! WHEN HE FOUND
OUT NOBODY FROM THAT CONVENT
HAD EVER BEEN OUT O' SPAIN,
HE DECIDED IT WAS TRUE!

AND I'M NOT THE
ONE TO SAY IT
AIN'T! OR THAT
MARIA DOESN'T
STILL WATCH
OVER TABIRA!

HER STORY MIGHT'VE
BEEN TRUE! WHO
KNOWS? BUT I
SURE DON'T
BELIEVE THE
GHOST BUSINESS!

THERE'S GOT TO BE
SOME OTHER
EXPLANATION FOR
WHAT FLARJACK
SAW! AND I AIM
TO FIND OUT WHAT
IT IS!

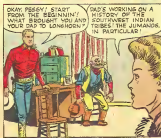
HERE'S HORN!
YOU GO! I'M
GONN' TO THE
JUNCTION
TONIGHT! BE
BACK TOMORROW
AFTERNOON!

MEANTIME, IF YOU'D
LOOK INTO THIS
KEELIN' FLARJACK
TURNED UP I'D BE
MUCH OBLIGED!

I'LL BE GLAD TO DO
WHAT I CAN! COME
ALONG, FLARJACK!
IT'S HIGH TIME
WE HUNTED UP
PROFESSOR NILES!

WHAT'S THIS
FELLA, NILES.
A PROFESSOR
OR, GENE?

HISTORY! HE'S AN
EXPERT ON INDIANS,
THEIR HISTORY,
LEGENDS, AND
CUSTOMS!



THEY'RE A LOST TRIBE THAT ONCE LIVED IN A VALLEY NOT FAR FROM HERE! ABOUT 400 YEARS AGO, THE WHOLE TRIBE VANISHED, LEAVING THEIR RUINED AND CHURCH TO GO TO RUIN!



GOON A' MIGHTY! TABIRÁ! WHAM! I SEEN THE FEMALE GHOST!

WHAT? YOU ACTUALLY SAW MARIA COONEL? WHEN? DAD WILL BE SO INTERESTED!



SEEN HER LAST NIGHT! I —

HOLD IT! WE'LL GET AROUND TO THE GHOST AFTER YOU FINISH TELLIN' US ABOUT YOUR DAD, PEGGY! GO ON!



A FEW DAYS AGO, DAD STUMBLED ONTO SOMETHING! HE WAS TERRIBLY EXCITED! THAT'S WHEN HE WIRED YOU, GENE!

DID HE GIVE YOU ANY IDEA WHAT HE'D DISCOVERED?



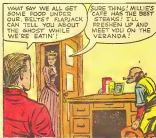
NO! WHEN HE LEFT YESTERDAY, HE SAID HE'D SURELY BE BACK BEFORE NOON TODAY! OH, GENE, I'M SURE SOMETHING DREADFUL HAS HAPPENED TO HIM!

DON'T GO BODDWIN' TROUBLE, HONEY! ANY NOTION WHERE HE WAS GOIN'?



PROBABLY TOWARD TABIRÁ! HE'S BEEN SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINS FOR TRACES OF THE JUMANOS! PLANS ON EXAMINING THE RUINS LATER!





A LITTLE LATER....

HERE COMES PEASY! REMEMBER, NOT A WORD ABOUT THE MURDER TO HER OR ANYBODY ELSE! IF THE KILLER THINKS WE'RE NOT WISE, HE MAY MAKE A SLIP!

GOTCHA, GENE!

WOMEN
HOTEL

ALL SET, PEASY?

YES! BUT FIRST I WANT YOU TO MEET MISS GUNTHER. A FELLOW-GUEST OF MINE! HAZEL, THIS IS THE FAMOUS GENE AUTRY AND HIS FRIEND FLARACK HOBBS!

I'M THRILLED AT MEETING THE GREAT OUTLAW HUNTER IN PERSON! ARE YOU ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS, MISTER AUTRY?

NO! BUT I'VE ALWAYS GOT MY EYES PEELER FOR MEN WHO ARE WANTED BY THE LAW!

WHY DON'T YOU JOIN US FOR DINNER, HAZEL?

I ATE AN HOUR AGO! I'M GOING FOR A RIDE AND THEN TURN IN! SEE YOU ALL TOMORROW!

KINDA PECULIAR TIME OF NIGHT TO GO RIDIN' ALONE!

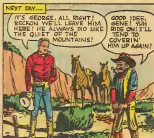
OH, HAZEL GOES AT ALL HOURS! BEFORE SUNRISE! AFTER MIDNIGHT! SOMETIMES, SHE'S AWAY FOR SEVERAL DAYS!

THAT'S REAL INTERESTING! WOULD YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW WHAT SHE'S DOIN' IN LONGHORN?

NO! SHE'S VERY CLOSE-MOUTHED ABOUT HERSELF! SHE SEEMS TO HAVE PLENTY OF MONEY AND GETS LOTS OF TELEGRAMS!



THAT'S STILL MORE INTERESTIN'! THINK I'LL KEEP MY EYE ON THAT LADY! JUST TO SATISFY MY CURIOSITY!



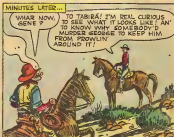
NEXT DAY...

IT'S GEORGE, ALL RIGHT! BECKON WE'LL LEAVE HIM HERE! HE ALWAYS DID LIKE THE QUIET OF THE MOUNTAINS!

GOOD IDEA, GENE! YUH RIDE ON! I'LL TEND TO COVERIN' HIM UP AGAIN!



THANKS, FLARACK! I'LL WAIT FOR YOU ON THAT RISE YONDER!



MINUTES LATER...

WHAT'S NOW, GENE?

TO TELL YA, I'M REAL CURIOUS TO SEE WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE! AN' TO KNOW WHY SOMEBODY'D MURDER GEORGE TO KEEP HIM FROM 'PROWLIN' AROUND IT!



SURE SPOOKY LOOKIN'! HUM, GENE?

YES! IT WOULD MAKE A SWELL SPOT FOR RIDERS OF THE BACK TRAILS TO HOLE UP!



GOON! AN OUTLAW HIDE-OUT! GENE! MEBBE YUH'VE HIT IT!

IT'S THE ONLY ANSWER I CAN FIGURE! TURN AROUND! WE'RE HEADIN' BACK TO TOWN!

DON'T MAKE SENSE! COME WAY OUT HERE! DO NUTHIN'! CERTIN' LOOK!

YOU CAN CROSS THAT OPEN STRETCH IN BROAD DAYLIGHT IF YOU WANT TO, OLD-TIMER —



BUT I'D RATHER COME BACK AT NIGHT WHEN IT WOULD BE KINDA HARD FOR SOMEBODY TO SPOT ME! AND, INCIDENTALLY, GUN ME DOWN!

SURE LOCO! NEVER THOUGHT O' THAT!



PROP UP THAT CAUSE, FLAGBACK! I'VE GOT AN IDEA, FOR UNMACKIN' YOUR FEMALE SHOOT AN CATCHIN' WHOEVER'S HIDIN' IN THOSE RUINS — AT ONE FELL SWOOP!



AS GENE AND FLAGBACK HEFTAIL IT FOR TOWN...

ANY SIGN OF THEM YET, DEACT

NONE! THOUGHT I SAW SOMETHING MOVIN' ON THE RIDGE AWHILE AGO! DECKON I WAS WRONG!



WAYRE YOU'RE WRONG, TOO, SIS! ABOUT AUTRY HEARD THIS WAY!

MUMBER! BUT I COULD SWEAR THOSE TWO RIDERS I SPOTTED THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIDGE WERE HIM AND HIS PAL!



I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO TOWN! I'M EXPECTING A WIDE ABOUT SOME NEW GUESTS FOR THIS CASK! IF AUTRY SHOWS UP, DON'T MAKE A MOVE TILL HE GETS INSIDE HERE!

DON'T WORRY, SIS! WE WON'T TAKE A CHANCE ON HIS ESCAPIN' TO SPILL THE BEANS ABOUT US!



LATER IN LONGHORN, GENE EXPLAINS HIS PLAN TO THE SHERIFF AND FLARACK, AS HE FINISHES —

DARNED GOOD IDEA, GENE. I'M SURE IT WILL WORK. I'LL LINE UP THE BOYS AN' TELL 'EM TO BE AT MONUMENT ROCK TWO HOURS AFORE SUNUP!

TELL 'EM TO LEAVE TOWN ONE AT A TIME! IF HAZEL'S TIED IN WITH THESE MYSTERIES, SHE WON'T GET WISE A POSSE'S FORMIN'!



GOTTA GIT GOIN'! ELSE ME'N JOCKO WON'T HIT TABIDA BY MIDNIGHT!

BE SURE TO LIGHT THAT CAMPFIRE WHERE IT CAN BE SEEN FROM ANY OF THE PUEBLO BUILDINGS! IF THE IMAGE SHOWS, LIGHT OUT FAST!



WHEN ARE YOU LEAVIN' FOR TABIDA, GENE?

AS SOON AS I TELL PEGGY ABOUT HER DAD. I CAN'T KEEP IT QUIET ANY LONGER — AND BE FAIR!



IF EVERYTHING GOES RIGHT, I'LL SEE YOU AT MONUMENT ROCK ABOUT SUNUP! IN ANY CASE, STAY THERE TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME OR FLARACK!

OKAY, GENE!



OH, GENE! — SOB! — I CAN'T BEAR IT! POOR DAD! HE NEVER HARMED ANYBODY!



STEADY, PEGGY! CRYIN' WON'T BRING YOUR DAD BACK!

I KNOW, GENE — BUT — OH! — SOB!



AUTREY! AND PEGGY! HE'S
FOUND NILE'S BODY!



I- I'M GRAY
NOW! GENE!
HAVE YOU
ANY IDEA
WHO- WHY-



AF-NO. BUT I'LL
FIND OUT! AND
TECK HIM DOWN
IF IT'S THE LAST
THING I EVER
DO!



SO AUTREY DOESN'T
SUSPECT ANYTHING!
THAT'S LUCKY- WITH
WHITEY AND TRIS
ARRIVING TONIGHT!



LEAVING LONGHORN,
MISTER HOBBS?



YEP! HEADIN' FOR
TEXAS! DO SOME
SPECKIN' FOR GOLD!



I AM A FOOL, THINKING HE WAS VICKING
WITH AUTREY! WON'T HAVE TO WORRY
NOW ABOUT MEETING THE BOYS AND
TAKING THEM OUT TO TABIRA!



THAT NIGHT AT TABIRA...

SOME LAYOUT, HAZEL!
FIRST TIME I'VE FELT
SAFE SINCE MEIN
WHITEY ROBBED
THAT SANTA FE
BANK!



YOU CAN STAY AS
LONG AS YOU'VE
GOT THE CASH,
TRIS! Y'VA NOT IN
BUSINESS FOR MY
HEALTH, YOU KNOW!



WE'VE GOT ENOUGH
DINERO TO LIE LOW
HERE TILL WHITEY'S
SHOULDER'S OKAY -
AN' THEN SOME!



AN' YOU DON'T
HARTA WORRY
ABOUT AUTREY!
DO ANY OTHER
LAWMAN! THEY
CAN'T GET WITHIN
HALF A MILE O' THIS
PLACE WITHOUT US
SPOTTIN' 'EM! I HOPE!





AS HAZEL SLIPS THE SLIDE INTO THE LANTERN...

GREAT GUNS!
FLADJACK'S
FEMALE GHOST!



THAT'S DONE BY A MAGIC
LANTERN OR I MISS MY
GUESS! NOW, I KNOW
WHERE TO LOOK FOR
WHOEVER'S HIDIN' OUT
HERE!



I'LL PICK UP CHAMP AND
THEN MEET BEN AND THE
POSSE!



HA HA! THAT DID
IT! HE'S PUTTIN'
OUT HIS FIRE!

HE'LL BE LIGHTING OUT IN
ANOTHER FEW MINUTES!
COME ON! LET'S GET BACK
TO OUR FIRE!



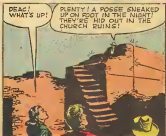
AT DAWN...

WHAT IN BLAZES!
A SHOT!



DEAC!
WHAT'S UP!

PLENTY! A POSSE SNEAKED
UP ON FOOT IN THE NIGHT!
THEY'RE HID OUT IN THE
CHURCH RUINS!



THE OUTLAWS MOVE FAST...



YOU'LL NEVER TAKE ME ALIVE!

HAZEL! STOP!



BOOH A'MIGHTY!
SHE JUMPED!

YES, FLARJACK! AND I RECKON
IT'S BETTER THIS WAY!



I STILL CAN'T
BELIEVE HAZEL
WAS BEHIND
ALL THIS. GONE!
AND THAT SHE
KILLED MY
DAD!

IT'S TRUE ENOUGH!
ROCKY'S TALKED PLENTY!
SHE FIGURED OUT THAT
MAGIC LANTERN TRICK,
TOO, TO SCARE
TREASURE HUNTERS
AWAY!



IT WAS SOME
HAUL! THERE'S
A REWARD FOR
EVERY ONE O'
THOSE FIVE
OYALDOOTS WE
BAGGED!

GIVE MY SHADS TO
PEGGY, BEN! SHE'LL
NEED 'EM, IF SHE
STAYS HERE TO
FINISH HER DAD'S
BOOK—LIKE SHE
PLANS!



I SUPPOSE
YOU'RE GOIN
BACK TO
TABIRA AN'
LOOK FOR
THE LOST
TREASURE,
FLARJACK?

NOPE! HAD M'FILL
O' THAT PLACE!
MIGHT MEET UP
WITH THE REAL
GHOST!



TOLD HAZEL WUZ
HEADIN' FER TEXAS!
AIM T'KEEP
MYWORD! ADIOS,
EVER'BODY!

SO LONG, OLD-TIMER!
CHAMP AND I ARE
HEADIN' HOME NOW.
TO FINISH OUR
VACATION!



SMART GAL

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His office was shadowed and cool when Sheriff Lloyd Telford came into it from the dust-laden air of the street. He closed the door against the heat and the clang of the anvil from Luke Mills's smithy next door. Then, scowling, he walked to his desk and took a large iron key from one of the pigeon-holes. He let the key dangle from his forefinger while he crossed the office and stepped through a door at the rear. Beyond the threshold, he glanced right down a fairly wide corridor, on one side of which were five iron-barred doors.

Abruptly he turned and went to his left through another door, one that opened into a comfortably furnished living room. He did not close this door. With Pike Mocklin in that middle cell, and Mocklin's two gunslinging pals still on the loose, anything could happen. It was better to have the way clear for action if it did.

Slowly he walked toward the kitchen whence came the splashing of water and gey, wordless singing. Fanny was at the sink, up to her elbows in soapsuds. She glanced up, smiling, as he loomed in the doorway. But her smile faded when she saw his deep scowl.

"What's wrong, Lloyd?" Her voice was low and soft like desert whispers at night. "Is—is Joy..."

"He'll be okay in a couple weeks, accordin' to Doc."

"Then what are you so all-fired worried about?" she asked.

"You."

"Me?" Her laughter rang briefly through the kitchen. "Why, there's nothing wrong with me."

"You bet there isn't," Lloyd said warmly. "You're the best darned wife a man could have. That's why I'm worryin' over havin' to leave you for a little while."

Fear flashed through her eyes. But her voice was calm when she spoke. "I don't understand, Lloyd."

"Oh, 'twon't be for more'n a couple hours," he assured her. "I've got to ride out to Warner's spread. Seems there was a—some trouble out there this mornin'."

Fanny looked relieved. "Is that all? Well, run along. Nothing can happen to me in a couple of hours."

"Zed Cragg and Bull Fiske might try to break Pike Mocklin outa jail," said Lloyd quietly.

"They might," Fanny admitted, "but I don't think they'd hurt me. All they'd care about would be getting hold of that key you're playing with and unlocking Mocklin's cell."

"Reckon you're right, honey, but I hope you don't aim to leave it where they CAN get it."

Fanny's eyes widened with surprise. "You're leaving it here?"

Lloyd nodded. "I've got to. Supposin' there's a fire?"

"I hadn't thought of that." Fanny reached for the key and dropped it into her apron pocket. "I'll put it there till I think of a real good place to hide it."

Lloyd kissed her, straightened his Stetson, and headed for the back door. As he turned the knob, he looked back. Fanny was again up to her elbows in soapsuds.

"Luke Mills'll be in the smithy all

mornin'," he said. "An' he'll be keepin' his eyes open an' his gun handy. So if those birds show up, pull down the window shade. That'll bring Luke over on the double."

Fanny smiled. "I savvy."

Through the window, the only one the kitchen boasted, Fanny watched Lloyd swing up onto the big roon's back. As he rode away, her smile gave way to a small frown. Lloyd had ridden right out into Main Street. Now, everybody would know he was leaving town.

An hour later, Fanny was measuring out the ingredients for a spice cake when the back door burst open and a harsh voice roared, "Put up your hands, sister! We got yuh covered."

Fanny was not surprised; she had more or less been expecting this. She raised her hands and turned to face two hard-eyed men and two menacing guns. "You must be Zed Cragg and Bull Fiske," she said.

"Right," growled the bigger of the two. "I'm Fiske. Now, we know yuh're alone here, an' we want the key to our pop's cell."

"The sheriff has his keys with him," Fanny said. "So I guess you'll have to shoot the lock off."

"An' bring the whole town here in two shakes?" scowled Bull. "I'm bettin' there's an extra key around somewhere."

"While you're looking for it, I'll finish mixing this cake—if you don't mind," said Fanny.

Bull took the six-gun from the cupboard shelf as he answered. "Reckon not. Reckon, too, afore we start lookin', I'll jest do this." Stepping to the window, he yanked down the shade. "Can't take chances on bein' spotted."

The next five minutes were the longest Fanny ever spent. While Bull ransacked the cupboard, Zed kept his eyes and his gun on her. She did not look at them; she concentrated on gently stirring the cake batter. And waited for the back door to burst open again. When it finally did, instead of Luke's gruff, slightly halting voice, she heard the cool tones of her husband!

An oath exploded from Bull's thick

lips. It was followed by the clatter of guns hitting the floor. Fanny turned. The kitchen was filling with men; some through the back door, others from the living room. There was the click of handcuffs. Then Lloyd was coming toward her, taking her in his arms, smiling apologetically down into her face.

"I hated usin' you for bait, honey," he said, "but I couldn't figure any other scheme for smokin' out these birds."

Fanny nodded. "I guessed it was a trick when I saw you riding away down Main Street, in plain sight . . . And then I remembered the Warner spread was closed. That's why I decided to make a cake. Then there wouldn't be any slip up like them finding the key before I could pull down the shade and signal you all to close in. But I didn't have to pull down the shade so . . ."

"What in blazes are you gobbling about?" Lloyd interrupted.

"Why, Bull obligingly pulled down the shade for me," explained Fanny, reaching for the mixing spoon and dipping it into the deep bowlful of batter. "And while he was doing it, I hid the key." She brought up the spoon and Lloyd's frown disappeared in a wide grin for in the spoon was the extra key to the cell doors!

"I'll be hanged!" Bull exploded.

"That's right," chuckled Lloyd, giving Fanny a breath-stifling hug. "Thanks to this very smart and very brave gal!"

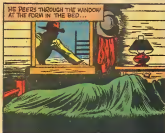


A BRAVE BUTTON

THROUGH THE NIGHT, THE SINISTER FIGURE OF A MAN STEALS UP TO AN OPEN WINDOW OF A SMALL HOUSE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SPLIT ROCK, ARIZONA TERRITORY.



HE PEERS THROUGH THE WINDOW AT THE FORM IN THE BED...



THEN HIS HAND MAKES A SWIFT GESTURE TOWARD HIS BELT...



STEEL FLASHES IN THE MOONLIGHT...



AND FINDS ITS MARK!







LOOK WOODY! AIN'T THAT
BUD REED AND GONE
PULLIN' UP AT LAMSON'S?

SURE IS! LOOKS LIKE
THE BOSS FIGURED THIS PLUMB
WRONG, HUH?



I'LL TRY TO GET A LOAD
O' THEIR POWHON! TELL
THE BOSS I'LL BE ALONG
FRONT!



I'M RIGHT SORRY ABOUT YOUR RUN,
BUD, BUT I'M NOT SURPRISED AFTER
ALL THE SKULDBAGGERY THAT'S
BEEN GOIN' ON!



THE ROADBLOCKS-AND
THE WARNIN' NOTES-AND
THAT LANDSLIDE LAST WEEK!
YOUR YUN SHOULD QUIT!

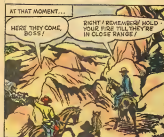
WE NEEDS
NEVER QUIT,
MR. LAMSON!
IS THE WAGON
READY TO ROLL?



YES, BUT IF YOU TRY THE RUN, I'VE GOT
A HUNCH YOU'LL BE
HEADIN' SHACK INTO
TROUBLE!

I'LL TAKE
MY CHANCES,
MR. LAMSON!







WELL, THEY'RE NOT
TAKIN' ME ALIVE!



WHAT'S YOUR HURRY, HITT?

OWWWW!



A FEW MINUTES LATER...

BY THE WAY, HITT, YOUR GANG DID A GOOD
RAIDING JOB LAST NIGHT...ON A SUNDAY /
HAVEN'T CHANGED SLEEPIN' IN A OWN BED
FOR A WEEK.!



HEY, RA! THIS WAGON
BETTER GET STARTED
FOR COTTONWOOD!

I AIN'T
DRINKIN' TODAY.
SUN / YOU
ARE AS A
REWARD FOR BRIN'
SUCH A DAMNED
BRAVE BUTTON!





